

**LOVE AND LIGHT:
The First Letter of John**

1 John 1-2:2

A sermon preached by
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God, source of all light, by your Word you give light to the soul. Pour out on us the spirit of wisdom and understanding that our hearts and minds may be opened. **Amen.**

1 John 1-2:2 Common English Bible (CEB)

Announcement about the word of life

We announce to you what existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have seen and our hands handled, about the word of life. ² The life was revealed, and we have seen, and we testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. ³ What we have seen and heard, we also announce it to you so that you can have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy can be complete.

The message: God is light

⁵ This is the message that we have heard from him and announce to you: “God is light and there is no darkness in him at all.” ⁶ If we claim, “We have fellowship with him,” and live in the darkness, we are lying and do not act truthfully. ⁷ But if we live in the light in the same way as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin. ⁸ If we claim, “We don’t have any sin,” we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong. ¹⁰ If we claim, “We have never sinned,” we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

Living in the light

² My little children, I’m writing these things to you so that you don’t sin. But if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. ² He is God’s way of dealing with our sins, not only ours but the sins of the whole world.

Love and Light: Living in the Light

A few years ago I attended a photography exhibition by outdoor photographer Tim Ernst. You may know him; he photographs Arkansas wildlife and landscapes, and he has published several books-and one of them is called *Arkansas Nightscapes*.¹ The program I went to was about these nighttime photographs. The first thing Tim Ernst did was to ask how many of us were from Arkansas, and we raised our hands. We could see that almost everyone there was from Arkansas. Then he turned out all the lights and asked us to raise our hands again if we were from Arkansas. And guess what? It was so black in the room with no windows that we could hardly make out anyone around us. And we just sat there in the dark, and he continued talking to us for about 10 minutes. And a funny thing happened, the more we sat there, the easier it was for us to see. Our eyes became accustomed to the darkness; our eyes adjusted so that we could see what was around us. And Tim Ernst told us that when he went out to do nighttime photography, he usually did **not** carry a flashlight and that his eyes adapted to his surroundings. And in this darkness, he was able to take the most amazing photographs of the stars and the night sky. Like this one of the Milky Way over Big Piney Creek.



¹ <https://timernstphotography.zenfolio.com/p1028602065>

But he talked to us, too, about the effects of light pollution. I found a website called “Globe at Night”² that is dedicated to raising awareness about light pollution. I learned there that light pollution is defined as “excessive, misdirected, or obtrusive artificial light (usually outdoor light).” The website says that “too much light pollution has consequences: it washes out starlight in the night sky, interferes with astronomical research, disrupts ecosystems, has adverse health effects and wastes energy.”

The website says that, “A little more than 100 years ago, you could walk outside at night even in a city and see the Milky Way arch across the night sky. Being able to see thousands of stars was part of everyday life, inspiring artists like Van Goh or musical composers like Holst or writers like Shakespeare. With more than half of the world’s population now living in cities, 3 out of 4 people in cities have never experienced the wonderment of pristinely dark skies.”

Have you ever experienced “the wonderment of pristinely dark skies?” This photograph is another one of Tim Ernst’s photos of the Milky Way over Piney Creek. And during the program, he pointed out that the light shining in the background is the light pollution coming from the town



² <https://www.globeatnight.org/>

of Russellville, several miles away. Even the lights from a city as small as Russellville can have an effect on our ability to see the night skies.

I ask you today - have you experienced the wonderment of the light of God? Today's scripture tells us that God is light. But we live in a world that seems so dark sometimes. Today's scripture from 1 John encourages us to live in the light of God rather than the darkness.

Just like the light pollution that keeps us from really seeing the light of God's Milky Way, we experience all kinds of pollution (there is all kinds of junk in our lives) that keeps us far from God. Even though the world we live in seems full of darkness God is still light. Even when it seems as though there is ONLY darkness, the light of God is still there. So, today I invite you to think about what might be keeping you from experiencing the glorious light of God in your life.

For the next few weeks, we are going to look at the book of 1 John. It's a short book at the back of your Bible. You may not know a lot about this book, so I want to fill you in on the setting and the context. This book was a letter written around 100 AD in Ephesus. Jesus would have died about 70 years before this was written. Many of the Christians to whom this letter was written would have been second or even third generation Christians. One commentator said that "in the first days of Christianity there was a glory and a splendor, but now Christianity had become a thing of habit, traditional, half-hearted, nominal. John was writing at a time when, for some at least, the first thrill was gone and the light of devotion had grown dim."³

And I couldn't help thinking, it might be kind of like this particular day – the Sunday after Easter – low Sunday – the excitement is gone – and we are back to the nitty gritty of a normal life. 1 John was written to the church in Ephesus to encourage them to persevere – to instruct them in the way of salvation and encourage them in living a holy life – as a way to brighten the dimming light of Christ in their hearts into a great light!

³ William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of John and Jude*, 3.

The big idea for all of 1 John – the message that is announced is – “God is light.” God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. That is my first point for you today -- **God is light.**

“The darkness stands for the chaos of life without God. Without God’s light the world is chaos, in which life has neither order nor sense.”⁴

There are several things we can learn about God from this message of light: We learn about God’s majesty and God’s glory. There is nothing more stunning than witnessing God’s glory as a light shining in the darkness. The stars shining in the night sky. The golden sunrise breaking through a dark night – or a glorious sunset breaking through after an intense thunderstorm testify to the majesty and glory and the power, too, of God. Or imagine the power of the light of God shining into your life in the midst of a dark time. God is a mighty God – who is surely able to shine that glorious light of love into any dark place.

This message also tells us that God is self-revealing. Above all things – light is seen! There is nothing secretive about God. God wants to be seen by each of us. God wants to be known by each of us. The light shines every day in our lives, and God just hopes that we might notice today that he is calling us. God yearns to draw us out of the chaos of the darkness and into his glorious light.

This message of light tells us that God is pure and holy. Light speaks to us of holiness and purity – of a lack of any hidden evil.

This message of light tells us about the guidance of God, too. One of the great functions of light is to show the way, right? God offers the light that is the guidance for our path.

But the message of light also tells us about the revealing qualities of light. If we want to examine something, we bring it up to the light, don’t we? I sure do! And in the light, all the flaws of a thing are obvious. In the light, we can see all the imperfections in any item. And so it is with us. The light of God reveals our imperfections. Against the light of God, no one is worthy.⁵

⁴ Barclay, 27.

⁵ Please see Barclay, 26 regarding the above qualities of God using the metaphor of light.

And that is my second point for you to consider. **Sin keeps us away from the light of God.** The idea is that there is a lot of pollution in our lives that keeps us from seeing the light of God. The pollution that we face is sin. Sin keeps us apart from God. Sin is like that light pollution – it distracts us so much from the bright light of God that we might totally miss out on the glorious splendor of God’s light or it might be a little dimmer than it could be.

The Hebrew and Greek words most often used for the English word sin mean “to stray from the path” or to “miss the mark.” The path is the path that God has set out for us. And so, sin would be straying from God’s path. Any time we step off the pathway that God wants us on, we are sinful. Any time, we are not the person God wants us to be, we have stepped off the path; we have missed the mark. Anytime, we fail to love God or people, we are off the path that God wants for us. And don’t we quite often find ourselves drawn to do things in our own selfish interests. We find ourselves doing those very things that will bring ourselves or others pain. The apostle Paul said in Romans 7 that sin causes him to do the very things he hates.⁶

In the book “Why?” by Adam Hamilton, he talks about the human tendency toward sin and say this about sin:

It leads to dictators and tyrants abusing their people. It leads to men and women violating their marriage covenants. It results in people worshiping idols like money, sex and power. In the end, straying from God’s path leads to pain for us and for those affected by our actions.⁷

When we put other things or people before God, when we sin, we create pollution in our lives. Teacher Kyle Idlemann said something in a Bible study that has stuck with me for years:

If a person did something wrong just five times a day – tell a white lie, gossip about a coworker, blow up at the kids, ignore the nudge to

⁶ Romans 7:15.

⁷ Adam Hamilton, *Why: Making Sense of God’s Will*, Kindle Location 205.

do something good, like call mom or encourage a friend – in fifty years this person would have accumulated 90,000 offenses!⁸

That's a lot of pollution – 90,000 offenses. And honestly, I probably mess up a lot more than 5 times a day. Sometimes we have so much pollution that the light of God is hard to see. God's light is always there, but it shines so much brighter when we can clear out some of that pollution.

And that is where the good news of Jesus Christ comes in. That is the third point I want to make to you. 1 John 1:7 reminds us of the Easter message:

The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.

And 1 John 2 says that here is what living in the light is all about:

My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you don't sin. But if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is God's way of dealing with our sins, not only ours but the sins of the whole world.

We no longer have to go to the temple and sacrifice a lamb for our sins – the blood of Jesus was shed for you – for the forgiveness of your sins and the sins of the whole world. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven when we confess with our whole hearts. 1 John 1:9 says: “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we've done wrong.”

The third point: **living in the light requires confession to clear away our sin.** If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from what we have done wrong. All 90,000 offenses, forgiven, just with the asking.

“Confession clears the pollution, and trust in Christ heals the decay.”⁹ It sounds amazingly simple, but actually it is agonizing because here is the

⁸ Kyle Idleman, *H20: A Journey of Faith*, DVD, Lesson 2.

⁹ Nijay Gupta, Commentary on 1 John 1:1-2:2, www.workingpreacher.org, April 2015.

thing about confession. It has to be true and meaningful confession. We have to admit that we have a problem to confess.

In a survey of Christians across denominations it was found that “although 98% believed in personal sin, only 57% accepted the traditional notion that all people are sinful and fully one-third said that they ‘make many mistakes but are not sinful themselves.’”¹⁰

We have to admit that we are sinful, and we have to say that we are sorry. And we have to mean it. That’s the thing – we have to mean that we are sorry – because if we mean that we are sorry for the thing that we have done or failed to do, we are going to have to change our ways because we know that we are straying from the path that God wants us on. And I’m not sure that we always want to be on God’s path. Because our own path looks so much better – it seems so much easier.

Confession involves examining our actions and our conscience. Confession involves thinking about whom we’ve hurt with our words and deeds. It involves awareness of failing to live out our baptismal vows to resist evil, injustice and oppression. Confession involves asking the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and to reveal areas in our lives in need of attention. And believe me, when we ask God to examine our hearts, God will reveal areas demanding confession.

As I was finishing writing this sermon, I looked once more at the words from 1 John. And at the bottom of the page in my study Bible in a little box in the corner I read these words:

How can we say that we love God when we live in and love the darkness? How can we say that we love God when we are leading others into darkness and enabling them to take up permanent residency there? How can we say that we love God when we refuse to confess our sins, refuse to forgive others, or refuse to be in fellowship with them because they have sinned against us? **Are we afraid of the dark or afraid of the light? Before we can be the**

¹⁰ *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. XII, 390

light, we must see the light. God's light saves, heals, cleanses, and restores us, despite our brokenness.¹¹

Do you remember my story about Tim Ernst turning the lights out and making us sit in the dark for 10 minutes and how our eyes became accustomed to the dark. Well, I'm praying that we won't sit around in the dark – I'm praying that we won't get accustomed to the dark. I'm praying that in the chaos of life, we will seek the light of God. It is shining brightly, God is trying to get our attention, through all of our junk – despite all of the pollution that might take priority– regardless of all those things that we choose before God in our lives – God yearns for the day that we clearly see God's light so that we can be God's light in the world.

Are we afraid of the dark or are we afraid of the light? Before we can be the light, we have to see the light. God's light saves, heals, cleanses, and restores us, despite our brokenness.

So, I invite you to live in the light of Christ in a more profound way, and to begin now by joining me in this prayer of confession.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All offer prayers of confession in silence.

Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Glory to God. Amen.

¹¹ *The Wesley Study Bible*, 1572.